

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 14523

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT UR

SUBJ: NEW SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA ON STALIN

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. COMPARISON OF THE ENTRIES ON STALIN
IN THE 1976 AND 1957 EDITIONS OF THE GREAT SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA
WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT THE ISSUE OF STALIN HAS LOST
MUCH OF ITS POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE 19 YEARS SEPARATING
THE TWO EDITIONS. ALTHOUGH THE NEW ENTRY IS MUCH LESS SPECIFIC
THAN THE OFFICIAL CONDEMNATION OF THE CULT OF PERSONALITY
BY THE JUNE 1956 CC PLENUM, OR EVEN BY PRAVDA'S 90TH BIRTHDAY
ARTICLE ON STALIN IN 1969, THE NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA'S OVERALL
TREATMENT OF HIM IS SOMEWHAT MORE NEGATIVE THAN WAS THE
1957 ENCYCLOPEDIA. THE NEW ENTRY MAKES CLEAR THAT THE
RESOLUTION OF THE JUNE 1956 PLENUM IS STILL CONSIDERED
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AUTHORITATIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE 1976 ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY ON STALIN IS ROUGHLY HALF THE SIZE OF THE EARLIER VERSION; THE 1976 ENTRY IS ACCOMPANIED BY A SMALL PICTURE OF STALIN (THE SAME SIZE AS THE PICTURE OF JOHN STEINBECK IN THE SAME VOLUME), CONTRASTED WITH A FULL-PAGE PHOTO OF STALIN IN THE 1957 ENCYCLOEDIA.

3. THE 1957 ARTICLE IS UNEVENLY COMPOSED, DETAILING STALIN'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN SOME PARAGRAPHS AND DEVOTING EQUAL DETAIL TO HIS FAILINGS IN OTHERS. THE FORMAL, "EQUAL TIME" APPROACH IS CLEARLY IN EVIDENCE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE 1957 PIECE IS GENERALLY UPBEAT ABOUT STALIN'S WARTIME ROLE, NOTING THAT HE HEADED THE CPSU WHICH IN TURN LED THE SOVIET PEOPLE TO VICTORY, A SEPARATE SECTION ON THE CULT OF PERSONALITY CRITICIZES STALIN FOR MISINTERPRETING HITLER'S AGGRESSIVE INTENTIONS AND FOR MAKING SOME POOR DECISIONS DURING THE COURSE OF THE WAR.

4. THE 1976 ENTRY IS MORE EVENLY STRUCTURED AND PRESENTS A SOMEWHAT MORE NEGATIVE OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF STALIN. IT TREATS STALIN'S WARTIME ROLE IN AN HISTORICAL SECTION WHICH SAYS HE PLAYED A LEADING ROLE IN THE WAR EFFORT BUT ERRED IN ASSESSING THE LIKELIHOOD OF HITLER'S ATTACKING THE USSR. PERHAPS IN DEFERENCE TO THE SENSITIVITIES OF THE SOVIET MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, THE 1976 ACCOUNT IS SILENT ABOUT THE QUALITY OF STALIN'S MILITARY DECISIONS DURING THE WAR.

5. THE 1957 VERSION OPENS BY CHARACTERIZING STALIN AS A "HIGHLY DISTINGUISHED" LEADER AND AN EMINENT ("VYDAYUSHCHIYSYA") THEORETICIAN, WHILE THE OPENING SENTENCE OF THE 1976 ARTICLE IS CLEARLY LESS GENEROUS, TERMING HIM "ONE OF THE LEADING FIGURES" OF SOVIET AND WORLD COMMUNISM AND A PROMINENT ("VIDNIY") THEORETICIAN. THE 1957 ARTICLE CONCLUDES WITH A SUMMARY PARAGRAPH WHICH EMPHASIZES STALIN'S ESSENTIALLY POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS AND INDICATES THAT HE WENT ASTRAY ONLY IN HIS FINAL YEARS. AFTER DISCUSSING THE CULT OF PERSONALITY AND ITS CONDEMNATION

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AT THE 20TH CONGRESS AND THE JUNE 1956 CC PLENUM, THE 1976 VERSION CONCLUDES WITH A TERSE SUMMARY OF STALIN'S VARIOUS OFFICIAL POSTS AND AWARDS.

6. THE AUTHORS OF THE 1976 ENTRY OBVIOUSLY USED AS ONE OF THEIR REFERENCE MATERIALS THE LENGTHY PRAVDA ARTICLE OF DECEMBER 21, 1969, COMMEMORATING STALIN'S 90TH BIRTHDAY. LIKE THE 90TH BIRTHDAY PIECE, THE CURRENT ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY REFERS

TO

THE JUNE 1956 CC PLENUM AS GIVING THE DEFINITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE CULT OF PERSONALITY (IN CONTRAST, THE 1957 ARTICLE DOES NOT MENTION THE JUNE PLENUM).

7. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, SOME INTERESTING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE DECEMBER 1969 PRAVDA ARTICLE AND THE CURRENT ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE PRAVDA ARTICLE UNMISTAKABLY REFERS TO THE STALIN PURGES OF THE 1930'S NOTHING THE OCCURRENCE PRIOR TO WORLD WAR TWO OF AN "UNJUSTIFIED RESTRICTION OF DEMOCRACY AND CRUDE VIOLATIONS OF SOCIALIST LEGALITY, UNFOUNDED REPRESSION AGAINST PROMINENT PARTY, GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY FIGURES AND OTHER CADRES". THE 1976 EDITION OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA NOTES ONLY THAT THE CULT OF PERSONALITY ENTAILED "CRUDE VIOLATIONS OF SOCIALIST LEGALITY AND BROUGHT SERIOUS HARM TO THE ACTIVITY OF THE PARTY AND THE CAUSE OF COMMUNIST CONSTRUCTION".

8. COMMENT: DISSIDENT SOVIET HISTORIAN ROY MEDVEDEV RECENTLY TOLD US HE THOUGHT THE ISSUE OF STALIN HAD BEEN SETTLED, AND THE TONE AND GENERAL CONTENT OF THE NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY SEEM TO CORROBORATE HIS VIEW. COMPARISON OF THE VARIOUS RELEVANT TEXTS--THE JUNE 1956 CC RESOLUTION, THE 1957 ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY, THE JUNE 1967 CC "THESES" OCCASIONED BY THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION, THE DECEMBER 1969 PRAVDA ARTICLE, AND THE NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY--INDICATES THAT THE EXTENSIVE ASSESSMENT BY THE JUNE 1956 PLENUM REMAINS AUTHORITATIVE, ALTHOUGH THE CPSU LEADERSHIP APPARENTLY FEELS THAT A GENERAL RATHER THAN A SPECIFIC AND DETAILED CONDEMNATION OF THE PERSONALITY CULT WILL NOW SUFFICE.

9. ONE EXPLANATION FOR THE CURRENT LACK OF SPECIFICITY
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WOULD BE THAT IT STEMS FROM A CONTINUING DISPUTE ABOUT THE DETAILS. IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT AUTHORITATIVE ACCOUNTS OF STALIN HAVE BECOME LESS SPECIFIC BECAUSE THE ISSUE OF STALIN HAS OVER THE YEARS GRADUALLY LOST MUCH OF ITS POLITICAL RELEVANCE. THE SOVIETS MAY NOT YET HAVE CLOSED THE BOOK ON STALIN, BUT THE PAGE IS VISIBLY TURNING.
MATLOCK

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